

Essex Farm's Full Diet, Year-Round, Free Choice, Horse Powered Membership: a Presentation for the Year-Round Growing & Marketing Session

Mark & Kristin Kimball
Essex Farm
2503 NYS Route 22
Essex, NY 12936
518-963-4613
kimball7@localnet.com

Essex Farm is located on 500 acres near Lake Champlain, in the small town of Essex, New York. Our founding goal was to create a CSA-model farm that provides a full and interesting diet year-round, including meats, dairy, fats, vegetables, grains and flours, etc. We built the farm around the desire to use draft horses instead of tractors whenever possible.

We have grown from seven to one hundred members in six seasons. Members pay \$2800 per person per year, with a \$400 discount for each additional person in a household. Children under 13 are currently free, and children 13 and over are full price. We offer a sliding scale for people who cannot afford the full share price. Our projected gross for 2009 is \$200,000.

Our facilities include two large barns, a state-inspected milk house, a greenhouse, a distribution pavilion, and a butcher shop. We currently have three full-time employees, four year-round part-time employees, and several more seasonal employees and volunteer helpers. Two years ago we bought 80 acres of land plus the farmhouse, barns and outbuildings, and have a lease on the rest of the 500 acres. We currently have about 80 acres of tilled ground in a rotation of row crops, small grains and cover crops. Most of the rest of the land is in pasture and hay, with about 90 acres in wood lot and sugarbush.

All our animals are pasture-raised, and slaughtered and butchered on-farm. We use no spray of any kind, nor any fertilizer except compost. We produce all of our own hay (7000 to 10,000 bales), and about 25% of our own grain. We purchase the remaining 75% from organically certified neighboring farms.

Here is a brief explanation of our farm's five main elements:

Full Diet

We strive to make the grocery store obsolete for ourselves and our members. We produce beef, pork, chicken, eggs, dairy, about 50 different kinds of vegetables, herbs, some fruit, grains and flours, dry beans, lard, and maple syrup, plus some bonus items like cut flowers, breakfast cereal, sauerkraut, kimchi, and soap.

What are some benefits of the full diet model?

1. We all eat like kings.
2. Diversity makes for a dynamic, interesting farm.

3. Providing a full diet creates “atomic loyalty”.
4. We benefit from the agricultural and economic advantages of highly diversified farming.

Year Round

Members pick up their share every Friday, year-round. During the growing season, members are encouraged to take extra vegetables to put up, to supplement the storage vegetables we offer in the winter and early spring.

What are some benefits of a year-round distribution model?

1. It highlights how satisfying and delicious it is to eat locally, directly from a farm, even in winter in zone 4.
2. We do not have to make a huge annual marketing push in early spring when we're busy with other things.
3. It spreads our work and our income more evenly throughout the year. There is no cycle of boom and bust.
4. Members learn to permanently shift their cooking and eating habits in order to use the share effectively, year-round.

Free Choice

With a few exceptions, there is no limit on how much members may take, or in what combination. We ask that they take no more than they can use in a week, and that they do not hoard meat. We sometimes place limits on items that are always in high demand, like pork chops, and products that are only available in limited quantity, like maple syrup.

What are some benefits of the free choice distribution model?

1. It acknowledges the fact that everyone eats differently. It makes the share more user-friendly.
2. We do not have to police what members take. We don't spend any time boxing or bundling produce. Members even wrap their own meat.
3. We can sell the feeling of abundance. Members get to eat like farmers.
4. Because we don't choose food for people, there is less waste.
5. For members, it divorces food choices from dollar values.

Horse Powered

We do all of our field work, sugaring, and some of our haying and hauling with three teams of draft horses.

What are some benefits of draft-horse powered farming?

1. Stewardship issues: Horses help close the loop of production, decrease soil compaction, increase fertility.
2. Community issues: Horses help create good will and loyalty among members and neighbors.
3. Horse pace & premeditation makes us more careful farmers.

Membership

Most of our members sign a contract committing to a full year, though they may pay quarterly or monthly or even weekly. This year, for the first time, we offered a summer share to seasonal residents, with a 25% markup. We do not do any retail sales.

What are some benefits of offering membership over retail sales?

1. If we do our job right, we only have to make a sales pitch ONCE per member.
2. We have no need for organic or other certification, since all of our members are invited to see and understand our agricultural methods for themselves.
3. We know our income projection at the beginning of the year.
4. It gives us the freedom to farm as we see fit, taking into account the health and happiness of our family, employees, animals, and the long-term health and fertility of our land. We do not have to make decisions based on the retail value of our products.
5. It allows us to legally slaughter and butcher on-farm.

About Mark and Kristin

Mark Kimball graduated from Swarthmore College with a degree in Agricultural Science. He bicycled across the country, working on farms, and apprenticed on biodynamic vegetable farms on the east coast before starting a vegetable CSA at Tate Farm in State College, PA. Kristin Kimball graduated from Harvard College with a degree in English Literature. She worked as a freelance writer and editor in New York City until she went to interview Mark about his farm in 2002. They founded Essex Farm together in 2003. Kristin's book, *The Dirty Life*, will be published by Scribner in 2010.

If you would like to receive the weekly Essex Farm Note by email, send a request to kimball7@localnet.com.